# Fourth of July by boxoftheskyking

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A little fill about getting together, reposted from Tumblr

# Fourth of July

**Author's Note:**

Thanks for the prompt kelly6ridge!

Steve, if pressed, would say that they are fine. Him, Nancy, and Jonathan. He'd say they'd reached an understanding, and he isn't angry and he doesn't get acid reflux when he sees her kiss Jonathan's cheek at his locker before heading off the class. He's eating and sleeping just fine.

Not that anyone *would* press, as he doesn't really have, well. Friends. Anymore. Besides the two of them and their gaggle of almost-freshman disasters.

A few weeks after the Whole Thing (the Will-is-Possessed, Dustin-Has-a-Pet-Monster, Dustin-is-Surprisingly-Okay, Eleven-is-Back, Mad-Max-is-Almost-Eleven-Level-Scary, The-World-Almost-Ended Thing), Jonathan cornered him outside the bathroom and said, "Look, man, I'm sorry about how it all went down."

Steve had blinked at him and said, "I think it all went remarkably well, considering. Miraculous, some might say. Straight up Deus Ex Madonna or whatever—"

"No, I—" Jonathan cut him off, then looked down at his feet like he regretted it. "Machina. I'm not talking about all the, the *that*, I mean me and Nancy."

Steve's stomach lurched up, sending that burning feeling up behind his ribs.

"Oh. Right."

"We should have talked to you. Or Nancy should have and then I should have waited. It's just with everything—You know. It was kind of a now or never thing and then—"

"I really don't need to hear this," Steve said quickly, and Jonathan flinched. "I mean, it's fine. You don't owe me anything. I'd say treat

her well, but I know you will, and if you don't she's perfectly capable of, you know." He mimed a shotgun, making a dumb little *pew* sound. It sounded more like a Star Wars blaster than a shotgun, and he felt ridiculous.

"Okay. Yeah." Jonathan jerked a little, almost like he was putting out his hand to shake, but didn't complete the action.

"Yeah."

They stared at each other for a minute, and then Jonathan started to turn away. Possessed by God knew what, Steve said, "It's probably for the best, anyway. I should be focusing on school. Stuff. School stuff."

Jonathan looked confused, but he wasn't walking away.

"I'm not doing well." He had no idea why he was still talking. "Like, at all. So. More time to study."

After about a hundred years of Jonathan staring wordlessly at him, Steve finally turned on his heel.

"Great, okay, bye."

"Hey!"

Steve stopped but didn't turn around.

"You can study with us, if you want. Sometime."

"Yeah, okay."

"Okay."

"Yeah."

And then Steve had fled.

It had turned into the occasional study session in the library, followed by a more regular meeting at the Byers house. After everything they'd gone through there, it was surprisingly

comfortable, and he didn't feel suffocated by their—whatever. Relationship. Love. Chemistry. Whatever. Not all the time, anyway.

Surprising himself—but not Nancy—he didn't graduate at the very bottom of his class. He got in to Roane County Tech— "Everyone gets in, Nance." "That is not true, Steve, and you should be proud of yourself" —which means he can still live in town and work for his dad while taking care of his generals. That's the plan anyway.

And now the summer's started and he's feeling like he has to do something to memorialize the end of the most fucked up chapter of his young life. Hopefully.

So, a Fourth of July barbecue. Two years ago, it would have been the event of the summer, everyone who was everyone from Hawkins High, including alum, would have come out, and there'd be people from towns up to an hour away.

And now it's Steve, Nancy, Jonathan, and the kids. There isn't any spiked punch, just sodas and iced tea and a shit ton of Cheetos.

Jonathan has brought nothing but his camera, though Steve saw him tuck a brown bag away beneath his chair. Mrs. Wheeler sent Nancy and Mike with a pan of hot dish which looks like death but mostly tastes like cheese and gravy.

Dustin is helping Eleven cook Eggos on the grill, because that's what normal looks like these days. Lucas tried to fight him for the role of "Grill Master" when it came to burgers and hot dogs, but Max had snatched the tongs away at the last second and proven herself to be more than competent.

(About a month ago, Steve had a run in with Billy in the school parking lot that he thought was going to turn ugly. Before any blood was spilled, Max had zoomed up, kicked her skateboard up into her hands and glared her brother down. "Steve counts as one of my friends, asshole," she'd growled, and Billy had spit on Steve's shoes and taken off.

"Still scared of you, huh?"

Max looked around, then leaned in and said quietly, “Wanna know how I do it?”

“Uh, sure.”

“Every time he starts acting like too much of an asswipe, I wait til he gets really drunk and passes out, and then I sneak into his bedroom and I stand at the end of his bed with my hair all—” she shakes her head so her face is mostly hidden— “and I just point at him and stand super still. And then, Mike gave me this toy he has, this really sick raptor, and when you pull on it’s leg it screeches. So I do that so he wakes up and go all *uggghhhhh*.” She twists her head and bugs out her eyes, and Steve has to admit it’s creepy as hell.

“That’s fucking disturbing,” he says.

She grins. “He thinks it’s a nightmare. He’s had night terrors for ages.”

Steve wonders if the rest of the kids appreciate how lucky they are to have her on their side.)

Will and Mike are playing some variation of rock-paper-scissors that involves a weird amount of hopping around on one foot and yelling.

Every time he loses, Will gives a delighted little giggle that carries all the way into the house. It makes Steve grin every time. He doesn’t know the little guy very well, but it sure is nice to hear him sounding like a normal thirteen year old.

It’s also nice to see Jonathan’s private little smile every time he hears it.

Steve catches Nancy’s eye just then, and there’s something in her face that tells him she’s noticed him noticing Jonathan. She’s cocks her head thoughtfully, and Steve strategically retreats to the kitchen. He takes a few minutes with his head in the freezer before opening the fridge to grab a beer.

“Whatcha doing?” Dustin asks, and Steve just about throws his beer across the room.

“Jesus Christ!”

“Sorry. Whatcha doing? Can I have one?”

“No, you can’t have a beer.”

“Aw, come on, it’s not like I’m driving.”

Steve rolls his eyes. “No, dumbass.”

Dustin sighs. “Fine. I hope you’re prepared for a bunch of really sugared up and caffeinated kids, though. Because I for one have had six Diet Cokes and I’m not ready to quit.”

“If you have to puke, use the bathroom.”

Steve ruffles his hair and heads back out to the pool.

“Alcohol is a depressant, Steve! You’ll be wishing I was drunk in about an hour, mark my words.”

“Alcohol?” Jonathan is suddenly right at his elbow, and he just about has a heart attack for the second time in as many minutes. Jonathan doesn’t seem to notice, instead snapping a picture of Eleven tripping Lucas into the pool.

“Want a beer?”

Jonathan grins at him. “I can do you one better,” he says. “Think the kids will be okay for a while?”

Steve looks over the group, catching Nancy’s eye and jerking his head towards the house.

“Hey, little shits!” he yells. “Adults are going inside. No drowning, no wandering in the woods, no setting shit on fire.”

“Okay!” Will shouts back before cannon ball-ing into the pool.

“El,” Steve says. “You’re in charge. Any nonsense, you come find us. Deal?”

She nods seriously at him, and he can’t not smile and give her a little

salute.

What Jonathan has is a bottle of Vodka and one of club soda.

“It’s from that Baumann guy. The reporter who broke the story about Barbara. Well, the fake story.”

“Hey, man, I look no horses in the mouth.” Internally, he kicks himself. There’s something about Jonathan Byers that turns him into a complete idiot.

Nancy comes into the den with three glasses and sets herself down beside them, the last corner of their weirdo triangle.

They toast each other wordlessly, grinning at each other after the first burning sip.

“Damn, Wheeler. You make ‘em strong.”

Nancy blushes, but then takes a long swallow without breaking eye contact. Steve’s brain misses a step, free falls.

As Steve is pouring each of them a second drink, he notices Nancy and Jonathan having some kind of wordless conversation. The beer and vodka mix with the acid in his stomach and he doesn’t look up at them after handing back the glasses. He’s about to say something about checking on the kids when Nancy reaches out and puts a hand on his knee.

“Hey, Steve.”

“Hey, Nancy,” he says, and waves, because he is an idiot.

“We were thinking. And talking. Have been talking. For a while.”

“A long while,” Jonathan pipes up.

Steve looks down at Nancy’s hands. He knows how long they’ve been talking, because he knows how long they’ve been dating, and he really doesn’t need to hear about it.

“Something isn’t right,” Nancy says, and that makes him look up.

“What, like with Will? Eleven? Is that fucking—” he doesn’t realize he’s halfway to his feet until he feels Jonathan’s hand wrap around his wrist and tug him back down.

“No, man, nothing like that. Sorry. That’s not what she means.”

“I mean with us. There’s something not right with me and Jonathan.”

Steve stares at her. There’s no way they’re coming to him for relationship advice. Nancy’s reckless and Jonathan’s a spaz but they’re not *cruel*, they’ve never been intentionally hurtful. He can’t think of a thing to say, but he must get his point across because Nancy’s face crumples.

“I’m doing it all wrong. I’m saying it wrong. Jonathan, say something.”

Steve suddenly realizes that Jonathan hasn’t let go of his wrist. He looks up, and Jonathan is staring at him, brows furrowed, like he’s trying to read his mind, or figure out some kind of code, or maybe like he’s taking a photo in his head, taking note of the light and shadow and the way Steve’s heart has started bleeding out through his eyes.

Jonathan doesn’t say anything, but he shifts his hand down to clasp Steve’s fingers. Steve looks down at it, dumbly. Jonathan shifts again, sliding his fingers in between Steve’s, locking them together, palm to palm.

“Is this okay?” he asks, and his voice is dry and scratchy.

“I— Um, okay,” Steve says.

Nancy moves her hand up from his knee, flattening her palm over his thigh. He looks up at her, then over at Jonathan, then down at both their hands.

“Wait. What?” He feels like he’s on the precipice of something, like he’s taking a timed exam and he knows he could figure out the answer if he just had more *time*, if he could just be in a quiet room by himself, not listening to twenty-five pencils scratching and the clock ticking and the teacher tapping her heel against the leg of her chair.

Nancy takes a deep breath and slides her hand up to his hip, then up under his shirt. He stops breathing.

“Okay?” she asks.

“I— I’m not hurt.” He’s not sure why he says it. But he can’t think of a reason for her to— for *them* to— unless. “I’m fine. Guys, you don’t have to worry about me, I’m—”

Nancy lurches forward and kisses him.

For the first and only time in his life, he doesn’t kiss Nancy Wheeler back. She pulls away and her face is burning red.

“Do you want—” she starts, then turns to Jonathan.

Jonathan’s mouth is open, gaping, and his tongue darts out to wet his lower lip and Steve suddenly has something wrapped around his lungs. Maybe the monsters are back, maybe something’s behind him and has just punctured through the center of him, maybe he’s been dead for months and is only just getting the memo.

And then Jonathan is kissing him, and is still holding his hand, and he tastes like vodka and ketchup and something suddenly, finally, slots into place. Steve opens his mouth, probably to say something stupid like “Aha,” or maybe “Eureka” or “Holy goddamn shit,” but Jonathan slips his tongue into his mouth and he can’t say anything but a groan in the back of his throat.

When they break apart, Steve is pretty sure he’s having a heart attack. He can’t seem to catch his breath, and his mouth feels wet and warm and Nancy is smiling at him so widely and simply, no disappointment and no secrets and no shame at all, just happiness.

And Steve says, broken and quiet and way too exposed, “*Really?*”

And Nancy tackles him to the ground, kissing his cheek and his neck and giggling into his ear, “Yes, yes, Steve, *yes.*” And Jonathan still has his hand, and he let’s himself be pulled down next to them, laughing, with his hair in his eyes. And somehow Steve has an armful of each of them and he shuts his eyes and breathes in, full and healthy and strong, it feels like, for the very first time.